The Ultimate Guide To Reading Music

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Preface

Welcome to this theory book! I want to tell you now that this won't be like any other theory book that you have ever read. This theory book is going to be more relaxed and more fun. I believe that learning is much better when it feels good and so, that is the feeling that we are going to try and create.

When you start learning from this book you may find some things that you don't fully understand. My advice for when this happens is to not worry about it. Music theory is a vast and complex topic and some things will take time to fully understand. Basically, in the beginning i will give you knowledge on a need to know basis; this way you won't get overloaded.

Let's push on and get into the fun of learning music!

Chapter One - Notes and Note Values

In this; the first lesson, we are going to look at notes and time values. Let's first take a look at notes.

Notes are a little tricky because, in music, the term 'note' has a few different meanings.

The definition of a musical note:
A. A tone of definite pitch.
B. A symbol for such a tone, indicating pitch by its position on the staff and duration by its shape.
C. A key of an instrument, such as a piano.

So let's take a closer look at this. In music, the term 'note' can mean: A tone of definite pitch.

Example: When you hit a key on a piano, you **hear** a tone of definite pitch - Therefore, the tone that you **hear** can be called a 'note'. Ok, that's one example.

Let's look at another. The term 'note' can mean: The symbol for such a tone, indicating pitch by its position on the staff and duration by its shape.

Example: Think about the piano again. When you hit a key you hear a pitch. For every pitch on a piano there is a musical symbol. These symbols are also called 'notes'. Below is an example of the symbol for one type of note - The Whole Note:

This type of note is known as a **whole note**.

Let's look at some other types of notes.

This type of note is known as a **half note**.

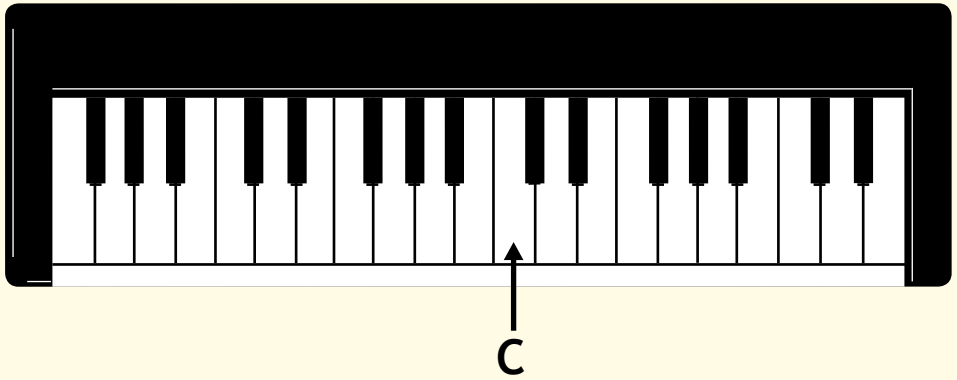
This type of note is known as a **quarter note**.

This type of note is known as an **eighth note**.

This type of note is known as a **sixteenth note**.

So, we've looked at two meanings for the term 'note'. Let's now look at another. The third definition for the term 'note' is: The key of an instrument, such as a piano.

A note can be the name of an actual physical key on an instrument. I'll demonstrate this with the following diagram of a piano keyboard.



The keys of a piano keyboard can also be called notes. Above, the arrow is pointing to the note 'C'.

O.k. We've pretty much covered enough on notes for now. Let's have a look at **note values**. Below is a table that shows you each of the note types you have learnt so far and how they relate to one another.

Whole note	𝅝
Half note	𝅗𝅥 𝅗𝅥
Quarter note	𝅘𝅥 𝅘𝅥 𝅘𝅥 𝅘𝅥
Eighth note	𝅘𝅥𝅮 𝅘𝅥𝅮 𝅘𝅥𝅮 𝅘𝅥𝅮 𝅘𝅥𝅮 𝅘𝅥𝅮 𝅘𝅥𝅮 𝅘𝅥𝅮
Sixteenth note	𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯

From the table above you can see that a whole note holds for the same amount of time as two half notes, two half notes hold for the same amount of time as four quarter notes, four quarter notes hold for the same amount of time as eight eighth notes and eight eighth notes hold for the same amount of time as sixteen sixteenth notes.

Test your Knowledge

Exercise 1 - What are these notes called?

𝅝 Name ..... 𝅗𝅥 Name .....

𝅗𝅥 Name ..... ♪ Name .....

Exercise 2 - Complete the following sentences by adding the right number on each of the dotted lines. (As an example, the answer to the first one is given.)

A 𝅗𝅥 lasts as long as 2 𝅗𝅥s.

A 𝅝 lasts as long as . . . . 𝅗𝅥s.

A 𝅝 lasts as long as . . . . 𝅗𝅥s.

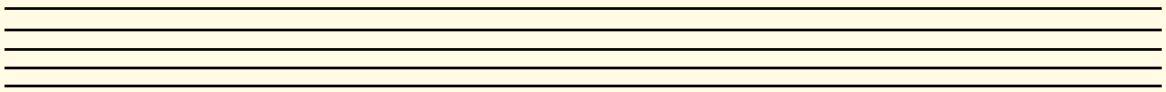
A 𝅗𝅥 lasts as long as . . . . ♪s.

A 𝅗𝅥 lasts as long as . . . . ♪s.

Chapter Two - Stave, Bar Lines and Time Signatures

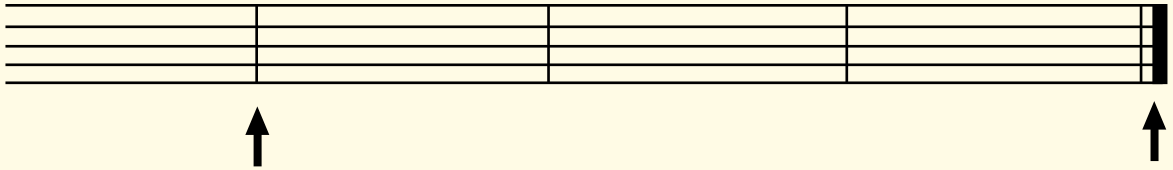
Now that we have covered notes and note values, we are going to look at **stave**, **bar lines** and **time signatures**.

For a start, let's take a brief look at stave**. Stave,** otherwise known as **staff,** is a set of five horizontal lines on which note symbols are placed to indicate pitch and time. You may have seen stave before, it looks like this:



Pretty simple really!

Let's take a closer look at what we can do with stave. Stave can be broken up into segments using **bar lines** - these segments are called **bars** or **measures** . A bar or measure is a unit of time that represents a regular grouping of **beats**; the type of beat grouping is indicated by a **time signature**. Now, that all sounds very complex and confusing, but rest assured, you will understand what i mean by the end of the lesson. For now, let's look at some stave that has been broken into measures.



Bar lines look like this - a single line.

This is a **double bar line**. Double bar lines indicate the **end** of a piece of music.

Take note that in the above diagram we have also added the **double bar line** - it is two lines one thin and one thick. The double bar line indicates the **end** of a piece of music.

Now that we have had a brief look at stave and bar lines, we will move onto **time signatures**. Hopefully, with a little bit of luck, all that we have covered so far will make sense to you.

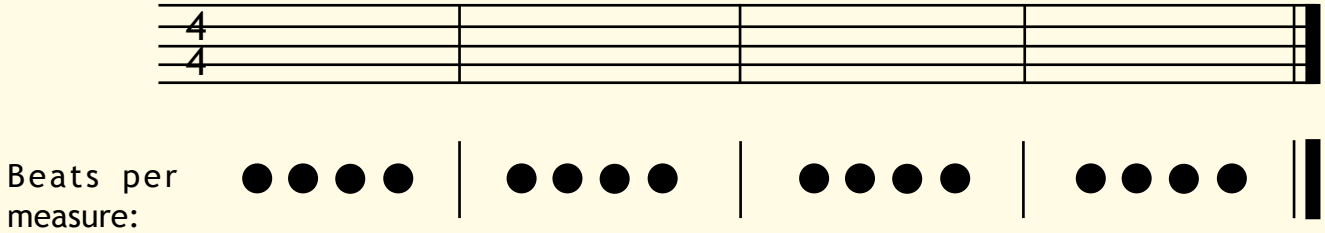
You will normally find time signatures on the stave at the start of a piece of music. The time signature is a symbol used to specify how many beats are in each bar and which note value constitutes a beat. Sounds tricky, but believe me - it's not. Times signatures are written as one number over another as the following four four time signature demonstrates:

$$\begin{matrix}4\\4\end{matrix}$$

Now, in a time signature, the top number designates the number of beats in a measure. So, taking the four four example above:

4 - This number tells you that there are four beats per measure in the music that follows the time signature.
4

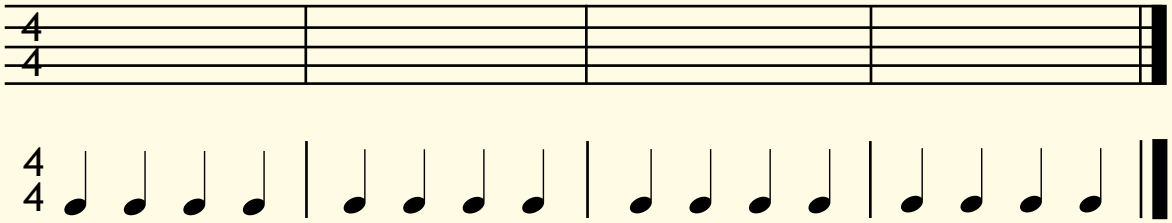
Right, let's draw that. For now, the following symbol will represent a beat : ● = One Beat



O.k. That's the top number covered - now to go over the bottom number. The bottom number designates note value to the beat. Let's look at the four four example in the following diagram to see how it doe's this:

4
4 - We read the bottom number as a fraction of the whole. In this example, the bottom number represents a 1/4 (a quarter). Therefore, this time signature tells us that there is one quarter note to a beat in the music that follows it.

If we put it all together, we can say - the four four time signature tells us that there are four beats per measure and that there is one quarter note to every beat. Let's go back to our stave diagram and add this new information in to see what it looks like.



Now that we have looked at the example of a four four time signature, we are going to move on and try two other time signatures; two four and three four.

Let's look at two four. If we analyse the two four time signature as we did for four four, we end up with the following:

2 - The top number tells us that there are 2 beats per bar.

4 - The bottom number represents a 1/4 (a quarter). Therefore, this time signature tells us that there is one quarter note to a beat in the music that follows it.

Knowing this, four measures of quarter notes in two four time would look like this:

O.k. We're racing through them now. Let's look at the three four time signature.

3 - The top number tells us that there are 3 beats per bar.

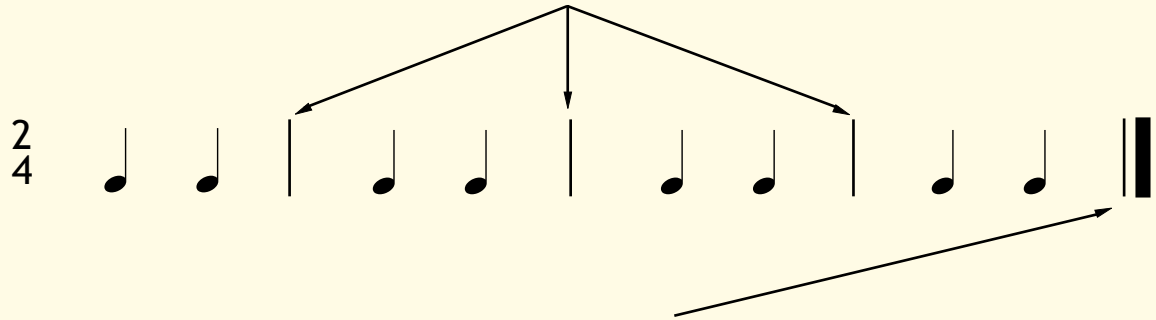
4 - The bottom number represents a 1/4 (a quarter). Therefore, this time signature tells us that there is one quarter note to a beat in the music that follows it.

Once again we will look at four measures; this time with three four time signature and quarter notes:

We will leave this area of music notation now, but come back to it in another chaper. Right now, we move on to **notes on stave**.

Test your Knowledge

Exercise 1 - What are these lines called? .....



Exercise 2 - What is this pair of lines called? .....

Exercise 3 - At the beginning of a piece of music you will usually find two numbers: for example, $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, and $\frac{4}{4}$

What are these called? .....

Exercise 4 - In directions such as $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{4}{4}$, What does the top number tell you?

.....

And what does the bottom number tell you? .....

So what is the full meaning of $\frac{2}{4}$? .....

And what is the full meaning of $\frac{3}{4}$? .....

Chapter Three - Notes on Stave and Clefs

O.k. Good to see that you are still with us. Right now we are going to get on with **notes on stave**. A little tricky, but nothing that you can't handle.

Think back to chapter two. In that chapter we covered stave, bar lines and time signatures and established that stave is a set of five horizontal lines on which note symbols are placed to indicate pitch and time. Let's take a closer look at how notes can be placed on stave.

Firstly, we need to look at notes to understand thier construction. Notes consist of a either a head, stem or tail or all of the affore mentioned items, depending on the type of note:

The **whole note** is just a head.

The **half note** consists of a head and a stem.

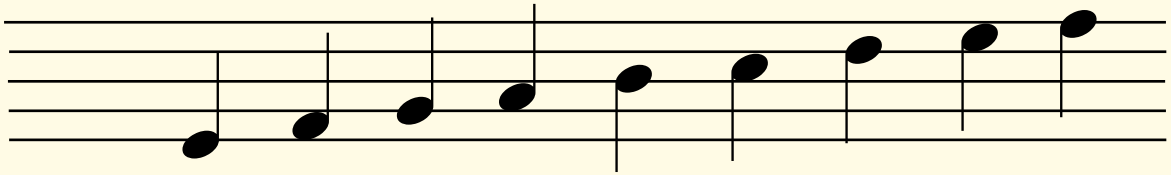
The **quarter note** consists of a head and a stem.

The **eighth note** consists of a head, a stem and a tail.

The **sixteenth note** consists of a head, a stem and two tails.

Easy so far - yes. Let's move on.

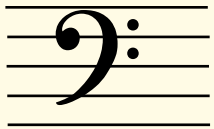
Notes are placed on the stave with the head of the note sitting either evenly on the line or evenly between two lines as the following diagram illustrates:



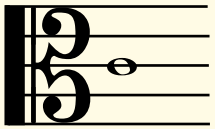
The stems of the notes below the middle stave line point up. The stems of the notes above the middle stave line point down. Notes sitting on the middle stave line may point either up or down - it comes down to personal preference there.

It's all good and fine putting notes onto stave, but they really don't mean anything until you add a **clef** to the stave. Let's have a quick look at clefs. A clef is a symbol used in musical notation that assigns notes to lines and spaces on the musical stave. A clef can be thought of as assigning a certain note to a specific line on the stave; adjacent spaces are assigned the notes that follow logically. The four main clefs are listed below:

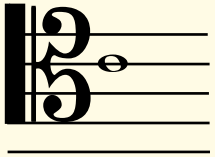
The treble clef
The treble clef is probably the most widely-used clef, followed by the bass clef. It assigns the note G to the second line from the bottom of the stave.



The bass clef
The bass clef assigns the note F to the second line from the top of the stave.

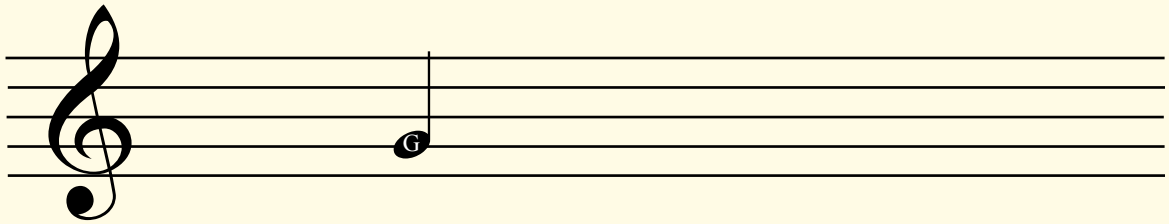


The alto clef
The alto clef uses assigns the note C to the middle line of the stave.

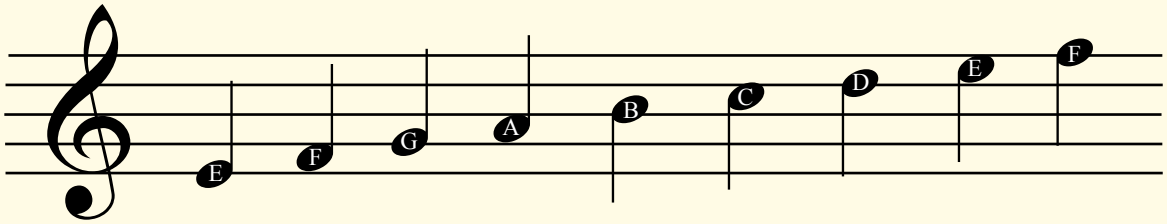


The tenor clef
The tenor clef assigns the note C to the second line from the top of the stave.

So, you now know what clefs look like - i'm going to show you how they work. Let's start with the **treble clef**. When we use a treble clef, the second stave line from the bottom represents the note G:



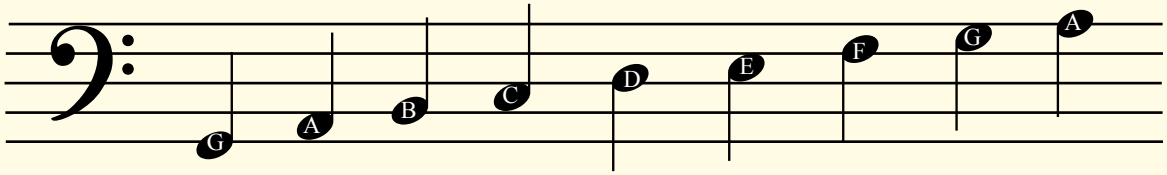
Now, there are seven notes in the musical alphabet. They are: A, B, C, D, E, F and G. If we place them in order around the G note on the above stave, we get the following:



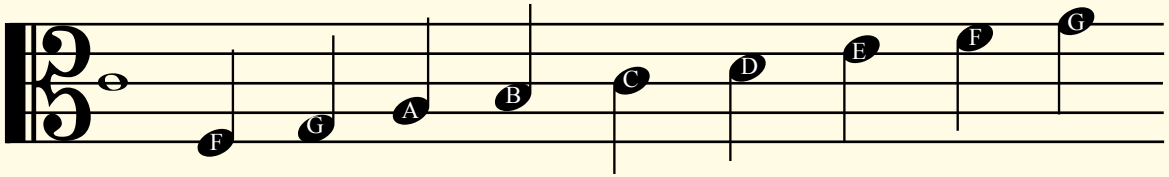
These are the notes in the treble clef.

Now that we have established how clefs work using the treble clef, I shall illustate the remaining menioned clefs below:

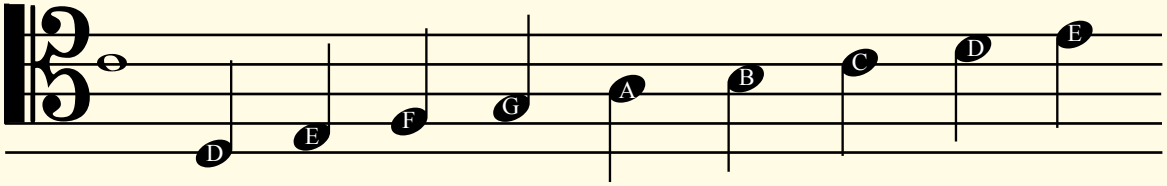
The Bass Clef



The Alto Clef



The Tenor Clef



All very good - let’s move on to something else.

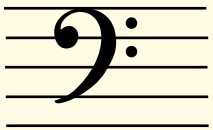
Test your Knowledge

Exercise 1

What is this symbol called and what does it mean?

.....

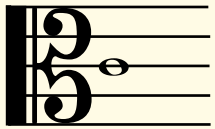
Exercise 2



What is this symbol called and what does it mean?

.....

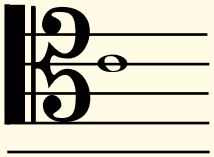
Exercise 3



What is this symbol called and what does it mean?

.....

Exercise 4

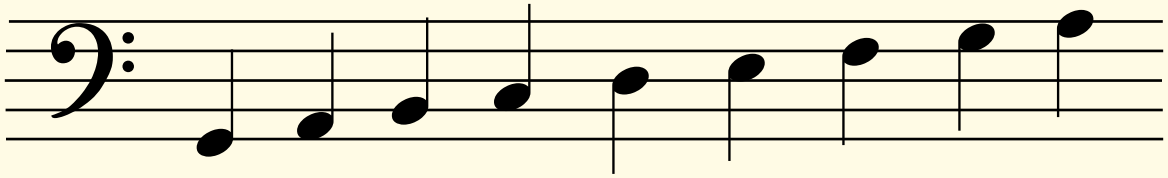


What is this symbol called and what does it mean?

.....

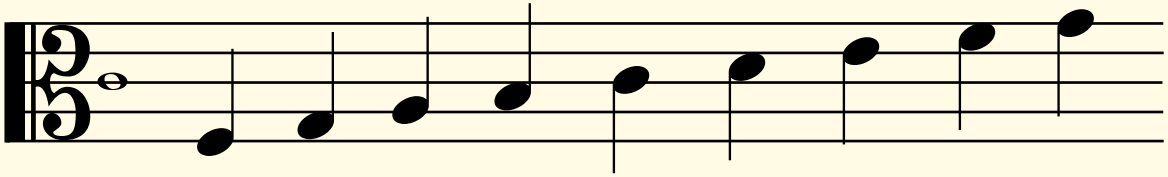
Name the following notes:

Exercise 5



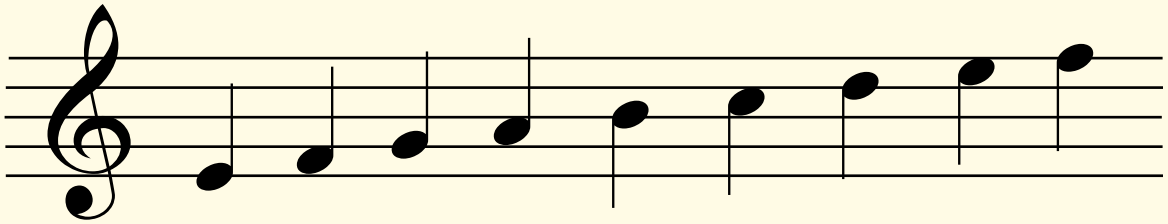
Note name .....

Exercise 6



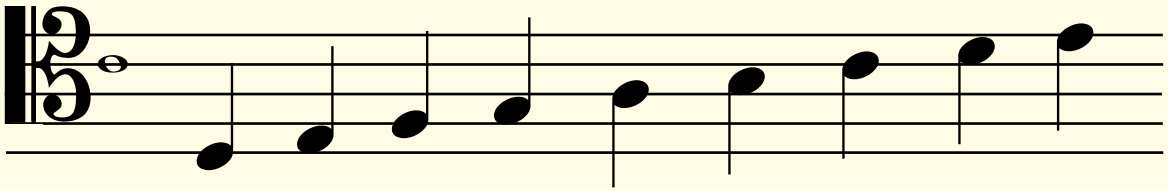
Note name .....

Exercise 7



Note name .....

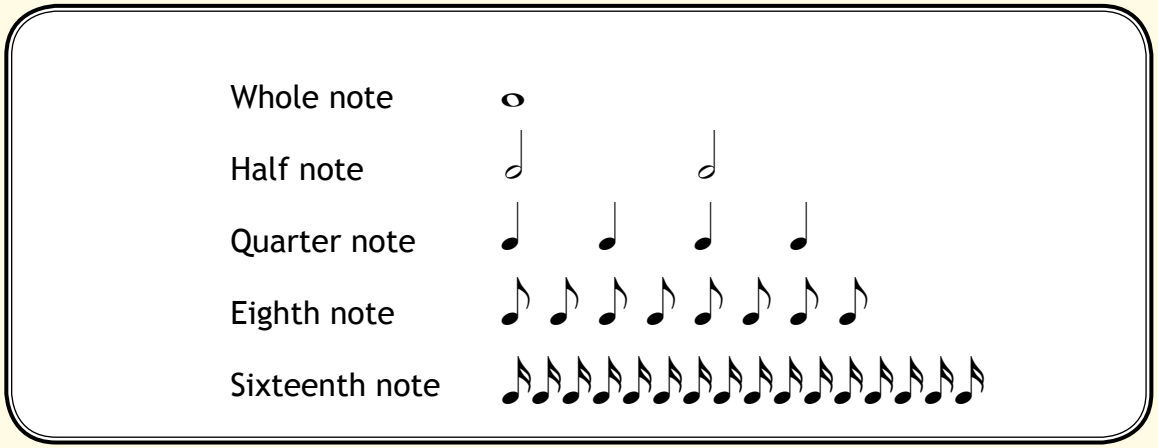
Exercise 8



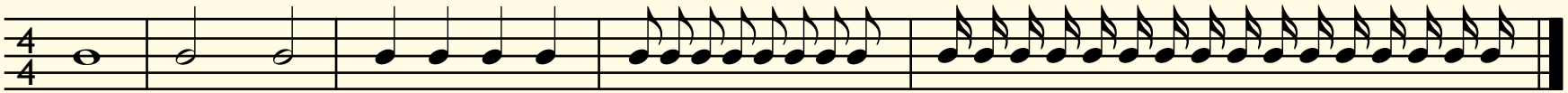
Note name .....

Chapter Four - Rests and More on Note Values

Earlier in the book we looked at **note values**. We are going to return to that topic and have a closer look. Below is a revision of what you already know.

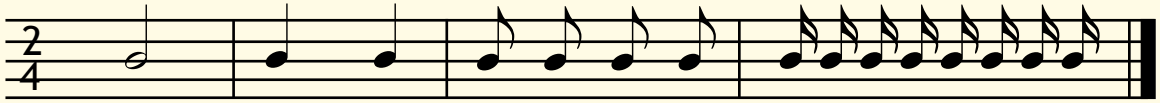


Now, when we last put notes into measures back in chapter two, we used only quarter notes. Now we will have a look at how we can place other notes on stave. Below are stave diagrams that demonstrate how each type of note fits into measures of four four, two four and three four time signatures.



You can see in the above diagram that in four four, one whole note constitutes a bar, as do two half notes, four quarter notes, eight eighth notes or sixteen sixteenth notes. Let's look at some other time signatures.

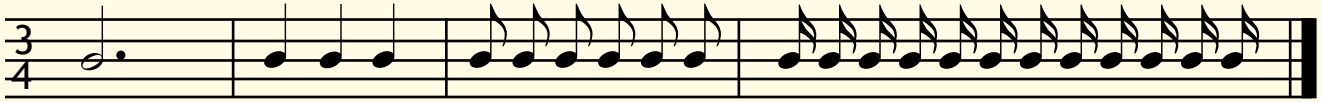
In two four, one half note constitutes a bar, as do two quarter notes, four eighth notes, or eight sixteenth notes as you can see in the diagram below.



In three four, one dotted half note constitutes a bar, as does three quarter notes, six eighth notes, or twelve sixteenth notes.

Adding a dot to a note means that you add half the notes value to itself. Let's look at an example:

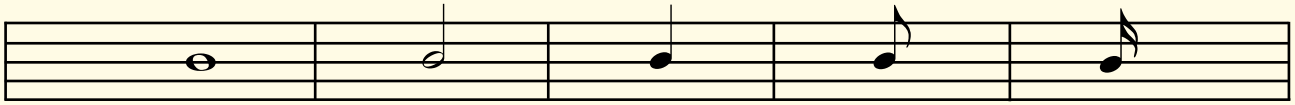
And this can be seen in the four bars of three four below:



Now that we have looked at note values in different time signatures, I would like to move onto rests.

A rest is a section of silence. Every note value has an equivelent rest value as shown in the table on the next page.

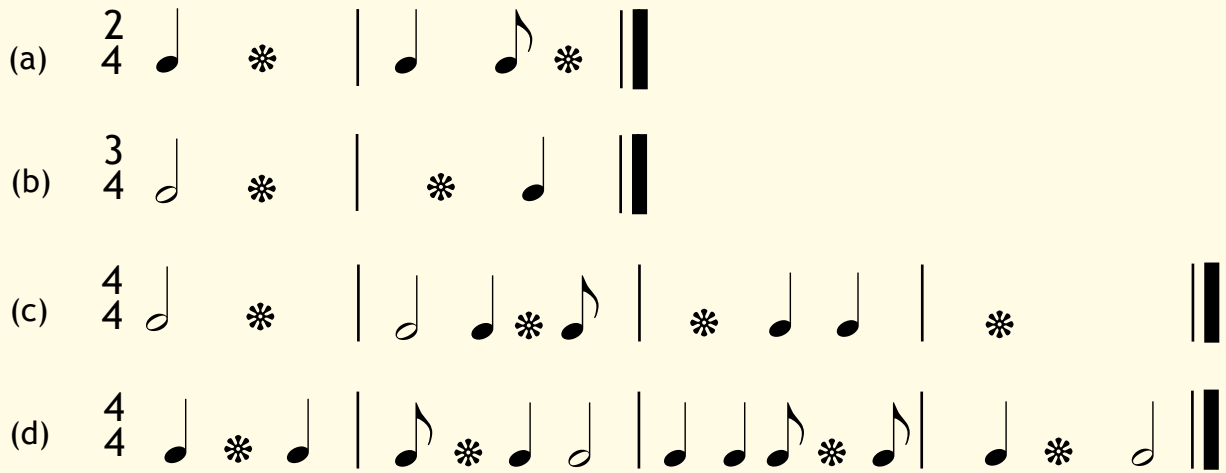
Notes: Whole note Half note Quarter note Eighth note Sixteenth note



Rests: Whole note Half note Quarter note Eighth note Sixteenth note

Test your knowledge

Exercise 1 - Add **One** note at each of the places marked ❊ to make the bar complete.



Exercise 2 - Please write the note equvalent of the following rests.

Note .....

Chapter Five - The Major Scale

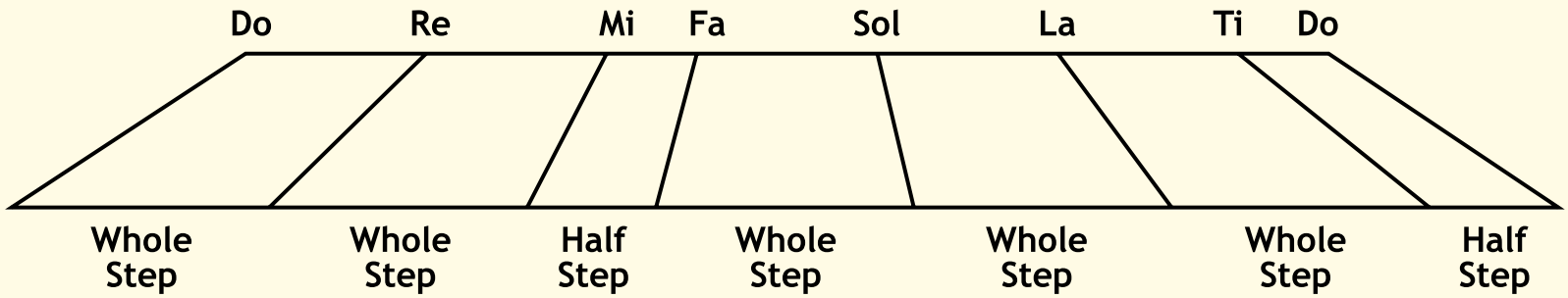
The **major scale** consists of a pattern of whole and half steps. A good way to explain the major scale is to use solmization. Solmization uses syllables to sound out the notes in the major scale. You may know it, it goes:

Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do

And it matches the major scale. Let's use the example of the C major scale:

Do	**Re**	**Mi**	**Fa**	**Sol**	**La**	**Ti**	**Do**
C	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**A**	**B**	**C**

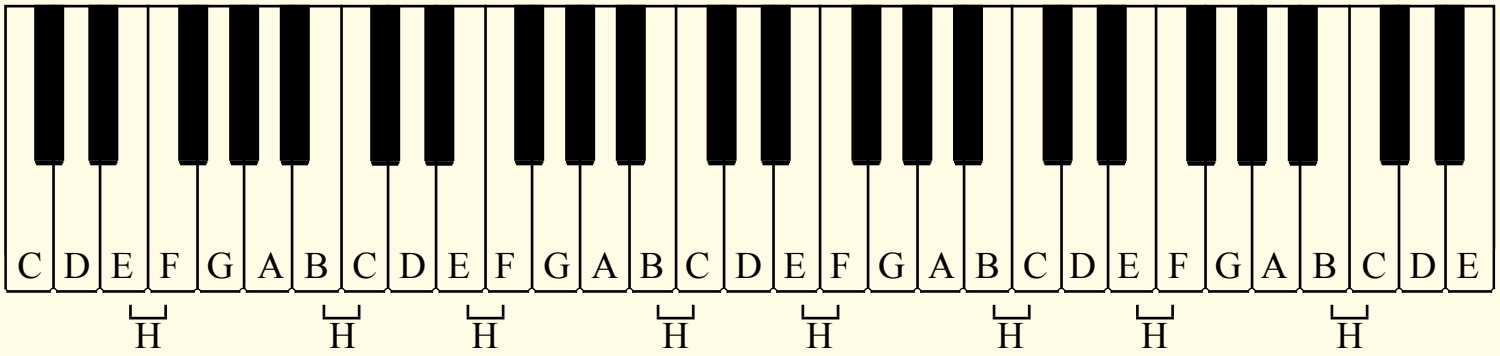
These syllables follow the whole step, half step pattern. This is demonstrated below:



Note the pattern; whole, whole, half, whole, whole, whole, half. Every major scale follows this pattern. Let's look at the keys of a piano to better understand this concept.

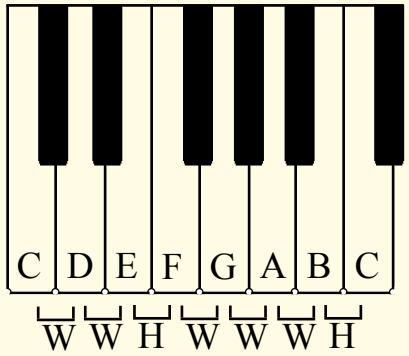
The following diagram shows you where all of the half steps are on the piano keyboard. All other steps movements on the keyboard are whole steps.

H = Half step



Just to make things clear, I want to show you the C major scale on the piano keyboard:

H = Half step
W = Whole step



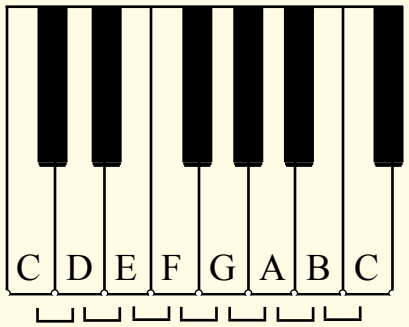
Notice the step movement: Whole, whole, half, whole, whole, whole, half. In a whole step you miss out a key (eg The first whole step above is C to D with a black key in between). In a half step you don't miss a key (eg E to F).

Test your knowledge

Exercise 1 - Write the correct answers into the spaces in the following diagram.

Do	**...**	**...**	**...**	**Sol**	**...**	**...**	**...**
C	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**A**	**B**	**C**

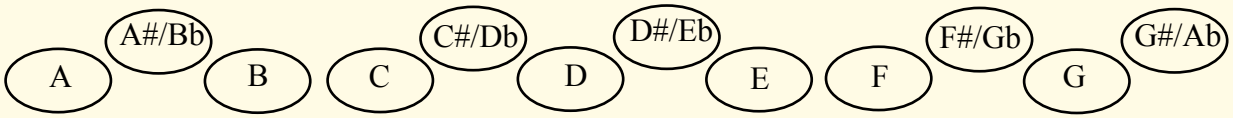
Exercise 2 - Using a W for whole step and a H for half step, write the correct step movement for the C major scale below.



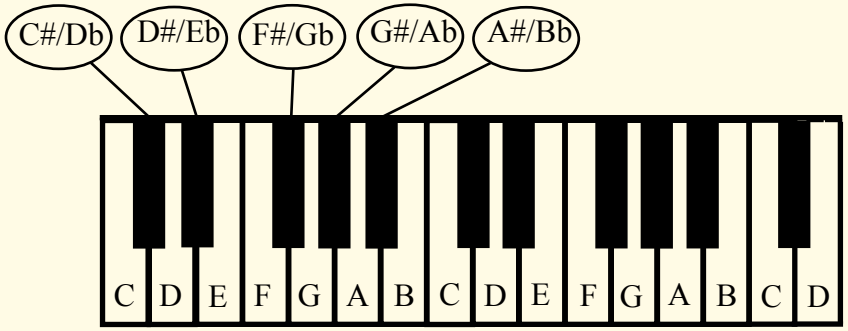
Step movement .....

Chapter Six - The Chromatic Scale

The chromatic scale is based around the seven notes of the musical alphabet (A, B, C, D, E, F and G), however, it contains a few extra musical notes. In its entirety it runs as follows:



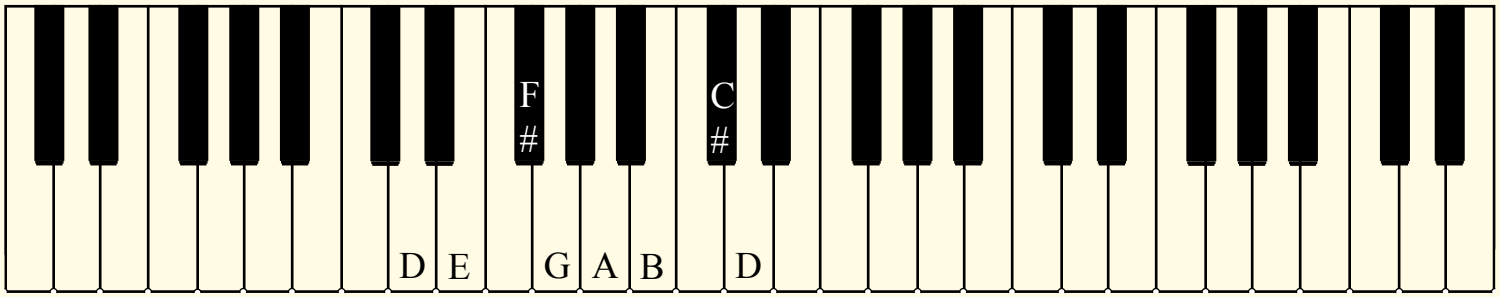
You have probably noticed that some of the notes in the chromatic scale have two note names. These notes are called accidentals. They can either be sharp notes, in which case we we use the symbol #, or flat notes, in which case we use the symbol b. This can be more easily seen on the keyboard diagram below:



On the piano keyboard, the black keys are the sharp/flat notes. The note name that you use depends upon the key that you are playing in. That is a little clomplex. For now, just realize that these notes can either be flat or sharp.

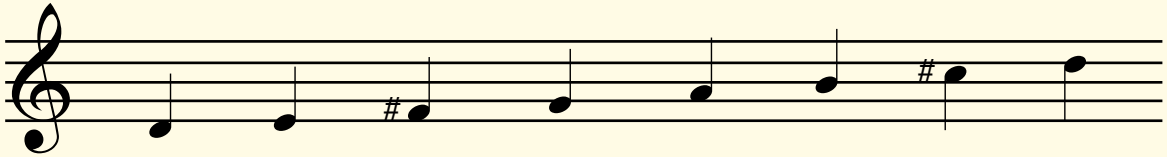
Knowing what you know now, things get alittle more interesting. We looked at the C major scale earlier. It is an easy scale to write and learn because it contains no sharps or flats. We will look at some other major scales now.

If you follow the W, W, H, W, W, W, H pattern on the piano keyboard, you can make any major scale that you want. For example, the D major scale:

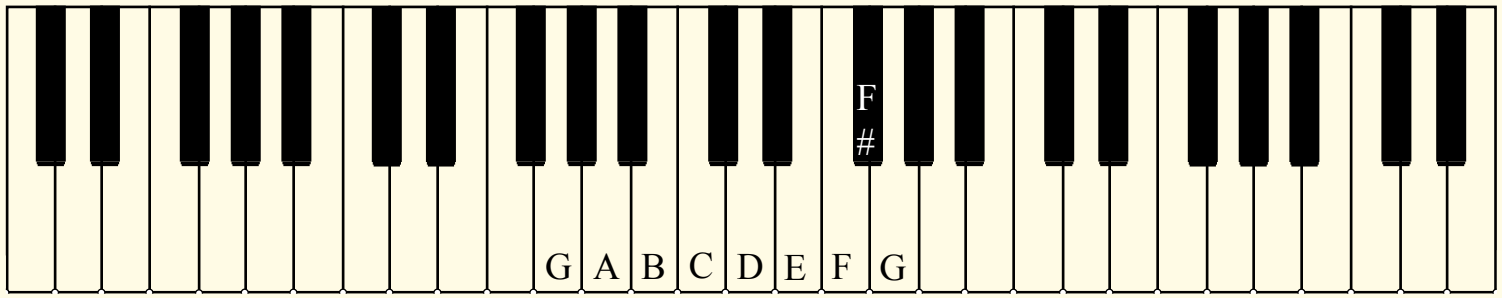


Major scales can be written on stave. Accidentals are placed on the stave directly before the note that they affect.

The D major scale

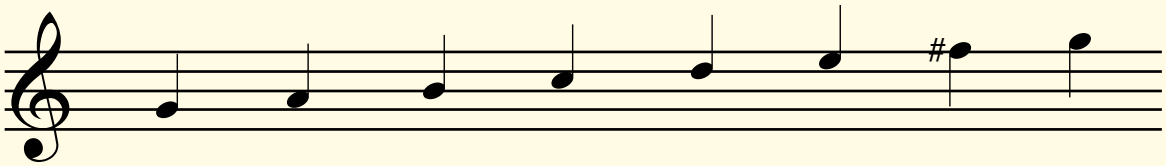


Let’s take a look at another major scale - The G major scale.



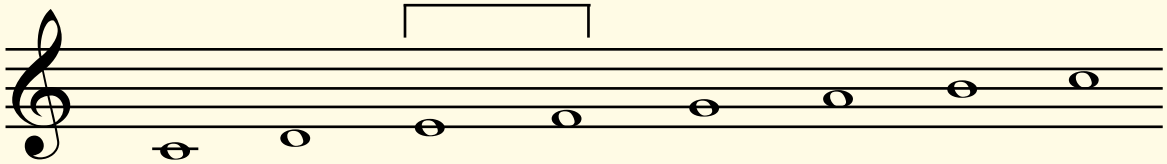
Below is the G major scale on stave.

The G major scale



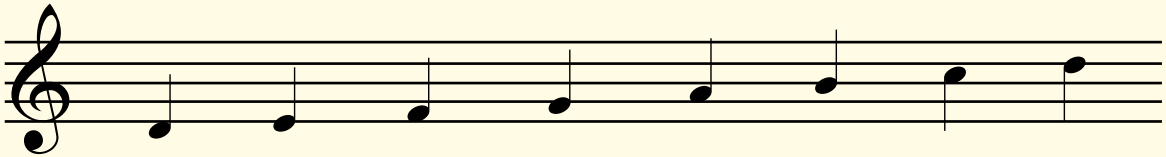
Test your knowledge

Exercise 1 - In this scale of C major, two notes a semi-tone apart are marked by ⌐¬ . Mark the other two notes which are a semi-tone apart in the same way.

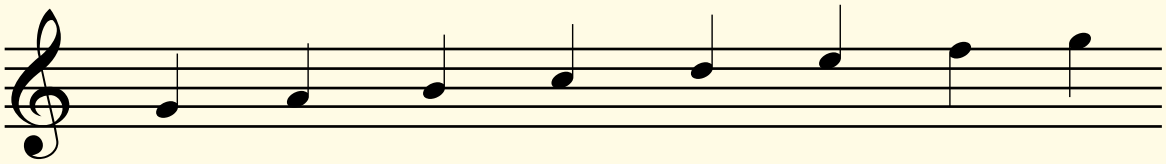


Exercise 2 - Add accidentals before any notes that need them to make the scales below. Then add a ⌐¬ above each pair of notes making a semitone.

The D major scale

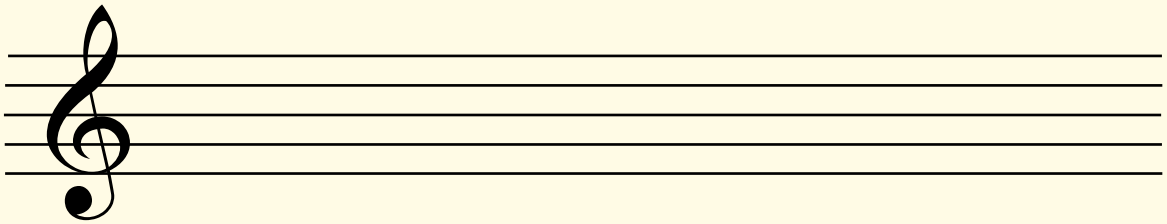


The G major scale

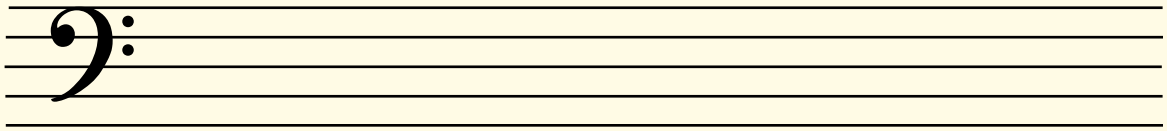


Exercise 2 - Add the notes needed to make the scales in each different clef below.

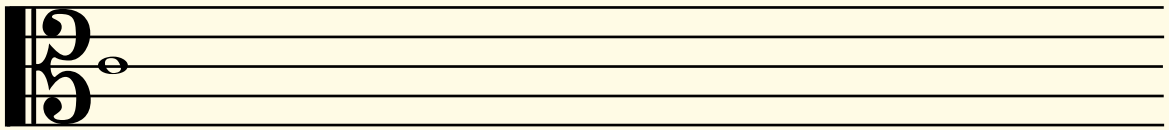
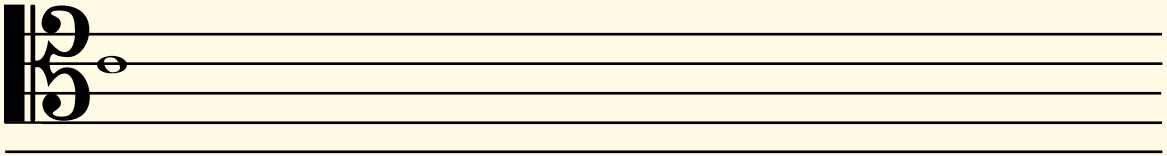
The D major scale



The C major scale



The G major scale



The D major scale